

ISLAM

Weakness can turn into strength

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Mahatma Gandhi was very shy by nature. In his book, "My Experiments with Truth", he confesses that it was a long time before he managed to shake off his shyness. While studying in London, he joined a vegetarian society. At one of its meetings he was asked to make a speech. He stood up, but was unable to express himself. Finally he brought himself to voice a few words of thanks and sat down. On another occasion, when he was invited to express his ideas on vegetarian food, he set his thoughts down on paper, but was not even able to read out what he himself had written. Someone, however, taking pity on him, read his discourse for him.

After passing his examination in law from London, he started his practice in Bombay. Here again his shyness was a stumbling block. When he appeared before the judge in his first case, he was so nervous that he could not say anything. He had to tell his client that he would not be able to pursue his case, and that he should choose another lawyer for himself.

But, as Gandhiji writes, this apparent disadvantage turned to his advantage: "My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself a certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen."

Mahatma Gandhi was well-known for his thoughtful and economical manner of speech. But this outstanding trait only came from another trait which few would consider outstanding. Initially his shyness prevented him from speaking in public; later on it made him thoughtful and economical when he spoke.